

Commentary on "Plato on Women: A Jungian Perspective" by Loraine Beattie Roberts

There are many extremely interesting points raised in Professor Robert's paper. And to consider them in detail would take much more than the 15 minutes allotted for commentary. Therefore I would like to focus on a few central themes with respect to Plato and Jung and sex identity where my interpretation of these two philosophers differs from those you have just heard.

It is important to separate the main thesis of the paper, from the attempt to support this thesis with historical research. The main thesis, namely that there are significant existential differences between men and women and that liberation of women should not imply the disappearances of these differences, is one that I wholeheartedly endorse. Furthermore, I think that it is one of the pressing tasks of contemporary philosophy to begin studying some of these significant existential differences, and to try to sort out those which might be considered analytic from those considered normical, or synthetic.¹ I will welcome some suggestions from Prof. Roberts which go a little further than the traditional Jungian delineation of the masculine relation to reflection and strength and the feminine relation to emotion and gentleness. In other words, in order to defend this main thesis it is necessary to state clearly what these significant existential differences are.

The paper, "Plato on Women: A Jungian Perspective", continues by attempting to show that Jung accepts and preserves male and female identity while Plato appears to demand a disappearance of the kinds of qualities which are identified with woman. In particular when individuation or self-fulfillment is considered as a human goal for Jung, men must grow to be more like women, (accept their anima), and women must grow to be more like men, (accept their animus), while for Plato the woman must become the same as men. Two questions must be asked about this: 1. Would a Jungian interpret Plato this way? 2. Is it a correct interpretation of Plato?

In trying to come to terms with a Jungian approach to sex identity it is important to note that Jung claims that there are not one but three central sources for one's countersexuality.² In addition to the anima or animus within there is also the influence of the archetypes of the opposite sex as well as the specific experiences one has had in one's own life with parents or close relatives of the opposite sex. This means that in order for a woman to achieve her full potential for sexual identification she must reach an integration of the unconscious and conscious of her own masculinity (the animus), the archetypes of the collective unconscious related to men (the wise man, the trickster, the spirit), and her own experiences of her father, grandfather, uncles and brother(s). The same process is true for men, although the archetypes differ. Some examples of archetypes associated with women are: the earth mother, the evil temptress, the virgin goddess, the old hag, and the maiden.

Most discussion of the relation of Jung to Plato has focused on a comparison of the archetypes with the forms.³ It is interesting, therefore, to consider Prof. Roberts new approach which considers rather the process which leads to liberation or personal individuation. And it is correct to claim on one level that for Plato to be a liberated woman in the Republic means to live like the men. In particular it involves being a soldier, a worker, or a guardian. There seems to be little attention paid to "significant existential differences" between women and men.

And yet, I believe that it is a superficial interpretation of both Jung and Plato to believe that personal individuation ends at the point of integration of one's countersexuality. For both of these philosophers the process of individuation involves an eventual spiritual transformation and rebirth.⁴ This ultimate goal is the same for both women and men although one should add that their respective starting points differ.

Jung describes this process in many different ways, but one of them, developed by M.L. von Franz, focuses specifically on the ascending importance of varying anima or animus figures.⁵ The lowest level is wholly physical and sensuous while the highest is religious and spiritual. The important point here is that the countersexual archetype serves the function of aiding the person to reach the fullest human development possible, it is a means to an end, not an end in itself.

In Plato we find the same emphasis. Both the Republic and the Symposium through the allegory of the cave, the divided line, and the ladder of love trace the process of the individuation of the person. The goal is to reach a vision of the good, to become reunited with the Forms, and to return to teach others to follow the same path.⁶ If one is a woman, then this process is more difficult, and it takes longer, but the goal is the same. The soul must try to escape the cycle of rebirth.

The important point to be made here is that in this process the soul is undifferentiated sexually. It is neither male nor female. Therefore it is incorrect to claim that for Plato the woman must become like man to be individuated. Both men and women are sexually differentiated by virtue of their particular bodies, but the soul is able to exist independently from the body. Therefore, if one wants to argue that Plato is advocating a disappearance of "significant existential differences" between men and women then they must argue against his thesis for the immortality and subsistence of the soul, not against his claim that men and women should be given equal education.

Furthermore, there are good grounds for claiming that Jung also believed in an immortality that was both sexually undifferentiated and personally undifferentiated in his claim that after death the conscious disappears and the unconscious passes into a collective unconscious where there are neither spatial or temporal forms of differentiation.⁸

My claim that for Plato the "original natures of women and men are the same" which Prof. Roberts suggests is weakly supported by section 465, in the Republic may be given additional weight by a consideration of the function of the myths in Plato's dialogues. Paul Friedlander claims that Plato uses myth on three levels in his dialogues.⁹ The first level is considered to be uncritical and similar to superstition. One obvious example of this kind of myth is the introductory discussion in the Symposium where the different speakers propose theories for the origin of love. The second level follows after a discursive and critical discussion of a subject, it goes further and leads one to new insights. Some examples of this level are the myth of Er at the end of the Republic, and the myth of Diotima towards the end of the Symposium. Finally the third level of myth fills the whole dialogue and "renders intelligible the mysterious aspects of life."¹⁰ The dialogues Timaeus and Phaedrus exemplify this level.

The significance of Friedlander's insight into Plato's use of myth is that one must take seriously the third level of myth and specifically Plato's claim the soul pre-exists, is born into a cycle of lives, and eventually escapes this pattern by becoming united with the Good. A man may be born as a woman for punishment that is, he is given a weaker body in the next life, but Plato maintains consistently that the goal for all persons male or female is to escape the bodily condition.

Finally, I think it would be interesting to compare the path of the process of individuation in Plato more closely with Jung's description of male and female personality characteristics. In particular, the identification of intuition in Jung with the feminine and of reflection with the masculine would lead one to conclude that Plato very clearly saw the need for a person to develop all of these forms of knowing. The philosopher must pass from sense intuition, through discursive reason and dialogue, to intuition of the forms, and ultimately to intuition of the good. The higher and lower forms of intuition all demand a passivity of the intellect, a receptivity which is traditionally associated with the feminine, whereas the middle part of the path demands education and active discursive thought. This means that women for Plato must be trained to develop their so called masculine side, and men their so called feminine side in order to achieve liberation. Therefore, I conclude that in the final analysis Plato and Jung have much more in common than it might first appear.

FOOTNOTES

1. For an explanation of these terms see: Michael Scriven, "The Logic of Criteria," THE JOURNAL OF PHILOSOPHY, LVI (1959) pp. 857-868.
See also Alison Jaggar, "On Sexual Equality", ETHICS, Vol.84, No. 4, July 1974 pp. 275-291.
2. C.G. Jung, "Anima and Animus" (Part II Individuation) in ON THE NATURE OF THE PSYCHE.
3. C.G. Jung, FOUR ARCHETYPES, trans. R.C. Hull, Princeton University Press (1969).
See also Jolande Jacobi, COMPLEX ARCHETYPE SYMBOL IN THE PSYCHOLOGY OF C.G. JUNG, Princeton University Press;
and Edward F. Edinger, EGO AND ARCHETYPE, Penguin Books, Baltimore, Md. (1973).
4. C.G. Jung, FOUR ARCHETYPES, Ibid.
C.G. Jung, MAN AND HIS SYMBOLS, Dell Publishing Co., New York (1971).
5. M.L. von Franz, "The Process of Individuation" in MAN AND HIS SYMBOLS, C.G. Jung ed., Ibid., pp. 157-254.
6. Plato. REPUBLIC, VII 517b-c. SYMPOSIUM 211d.
7. Plato, PHAEDRUS 248e, 249e, 249c. LAWS X 892 a.
8. C.G. Jung, MEMORIES, DREAMS, REFLECTIONS, Random House (1963).
9. Paul Friedlander, PLATO: AN INTRODUCTION, Harper Torchbook (1964) pp. 176-9, 189-90, 207-8.
10. Friedlander, Ibid. p. 210.

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Bibliography on the subject of women in the History of Philosophy by the same author.

1. "Plato on Women", FEMINIST STUDIES, Vol. 2, no. 2/3, December 1974.
2. "Can a Woman be Good in the Same Way as A Man?", DIALOGUE, Vol. 10, No.3, 1971.
3. "Conceptual History as a Methodology in Women's Studies", MCGILL JOURNAL OF EDUCATION, Vol X, No. 1, Spring 1975.
4. "Women and Persons", in MOTHER WAS NOT A PERSON, M. Anderson, ed., Content Publishing Co., Montreal.
5. For a critique of my views on Sexual-Polarity see;
A. Jaggar, "On Sexual Equality", ETHICS, Vol. 84. No. 4., July 1974.pp.257-291